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ABSTRACT

For a library to function effectively, it is essential that it fosters an open management style, which encourages communication of ideas and objectives both within the library itself and, by example, in other elements in the overall administration of which the library is a part. This paper describes the improvement in morale, efficiency, and flexibility in the Bundestag (Germany) library from such an approach, with specific reference to the experiences of commissioning and installing an automated library system within a very short period. The paper covers the following topics: (1) overview of the Bundestag library; (2) introduction of new communication structures in the library, including section heads and chief librarian, special coordinators, and working groups; (3) communication with structures external to the library, including difficulties in external communication, difficulties due to discrete management styles and interference caused by political circumstances, and disruption due to elections and their parliamentary effects; and (4) outcomes from the new communicative management philosophy, including introduction of new library software as an example of a "learning organization," communication in the workplace which creates flexibility, communication which leads to quality management, and communication and outsourcing. (Author/MES)

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Effective Communication: An essential tool to cope with the challenge of Technological Change

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Abstract

For a library to function effectively it is essential that it fosters an open management style, which encourages communication of ideas and objectives both within the library itself, and hopefully by example, in other elements in the overall administration of which the library is a part. This paper describes the improvement in morale, efficiency and flexibility in the Bundestag library from such an approach, with specific reference to the author's experiences in commissioning and installing an automated library system within a very short period.

Paper

I. Introduction

Information-gathering organisations such as parliamentary libraries, play a key role in the decision-making processes of parliaments. For opposition parties in particular, which often have a much harder time gaining access to adequate information than the governing parties, the parliamentary library constitutes a crucially important information source on which to base challenges to the government's policies.

It follows that such libraries must perform effectively. The hypothesis on which this paper is based, is that the more effectively libraries manage information, the greater the influence they will also have on their clientele and upon their administrative environment. Information service providers work better if their function and value is fully recognised by their colleagues,

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so it is important to create and maintain appropriate conditions to encourage this - not just practical conditions, but also the intellectual and managerial environment in which they fulfil their functions.

2. Overview of the Bundestag library

The Bundestag library has around 100 employees; statistically 87.5 of them have full-time positions. The Chief Librarian oversees administration, and coordinates policies regarding all personnel matters with the Head of the Budget Department as well as with the relevant Head of Personnel. The library does not have its own IT Section.

The library, as an administrative unit, is part of the Subdirectorate for Documentation comprising four units other than the library, which together have around 65 employees, the majority of them in intermediate and upper intermediate clerical service. In terms of personnel, the library constitutes the largest unit by far. It does not conform to the administrative structure of other units. This applies to the way it works and also to personnel structures and management techniques. It should be noted, in particular, that library personnel do not have experience in administration, being better characterised as a team of specialists. However there are similarities with other units in the Subdirectorate for Documentation - all but one are involved with the acquisition of information. On the other hand, they are relatively small, so the introduction of new technologies and the coordination of certain workflows can take place with a great deal less disruption. It should also be taken into account that the other units work almost exclusively for the Bundestag administration. The Bundestag library, also provides information-related services outside the parliament. This follows automatically from the fact that a library with such a large and valuable collection should make its resources available to a larger circle of users.

This essential difference in focus has the potential to create difficulties in the relationship between the Chief Librarian and the Head of the Subdirectorate for Documentation. The Chief Librarian needs freedom to work differently to the other units but should be included in the general planning of parliamentary work. This pre-supposes a great deal of understanding and a manifest willingness on both sides to communicate.

The Subdirectorate for Documentation is part of the Directorate for Research Services. Research Services is subject to a high level of personnel fluctuation, in that young research assistants begin working for the parliament there and are later transferred internally to other areas, in contrast to the Documentation Subdirectorate, where in some cases the same people have worked for decades. I emphasise this here only because it illustrates to a certain extent the way the library is perceived by other areas of the administration.

3. Introduction of new communication structures in the library

3.1. Section Heads and Chief Librarian

Until 1990, the Bundestag library had a relatively authoritarian management style. The four different Sections, each about 25 employees, worked in comparative isolation. Responsibility for policies affecting the library as a whole was solely in the hands of the Chief Librarian, and was not discussed with the Section Heads.

An initial phase of modernisation took place from 1990 to 1995, beginning with a weekly briefing of the four Section Heads on all library matters by the Chief Librarian, to facilitate understanding of problems and to formulate the best possible strategy for resolving them. This involved two-way communication between the Chief Librarian and Section Heads - on policies formulated by the German Bundestag administration, and problems arising internally within various Sections. In 90% of the cases a consensus is reached that serves as a basis for joint action. However, after a period of adjustment this much broader basis for

decision-making resulted in improved longer-term planning and a higher level of acceptance by library staff of these plans.

In turn, Section Heads provide regular briefings at their levels on the jointly formulated policies, implement solutions to the problems to be dealt with, supervise this process, and ensure that a result is attained. Consequently, when the outcomes are brought back to the management level and are discussed in detail, they can be given full approval with all participants completely aware of the processes involved.

3.2. Special Coordinators

It became quickly apparent that the Chief Librarian would not be able to manage every aspect of computer use, along with general oversight of the library. A new Data Processing Coordinator position was created, directly responsible to the Chief Librarian, to monitor and coordinate automated systems, and handle related technical questions and administrative procedures.

A senior Librarian position was also created within the Chief Librarian's office. The duties of this officer were to supervise staff training for computer system, especially new appointees; to provide technical support at the intermediate and upper intermediate service levels in connection with changes ordered by the Chief Librarian; and in particular, to liaise with the various levels of the intermediate and upper intermediate service. The fact that this staff member was able to speak with relative openness to colleagues at the same level played an important role in this context. It very quickly proved to be the case that through this liaison, these non-management officers also had direct access to the Chief Librarian. This made it possible for the Chief Librarian to intervene rapidly whenever there were signs of dissatisfaction, and to speak with the relevant Section heads in order to eliminate potential problems.

3.3 Working groups - a broader distribution of specialist knowledge and learning processes

A new management style came about to some degree as a result of a complete generational change of personnel within the Bundestag library. In the course of three years the library lost almost all of its management personnel in the higher, upper intermediate, and intermediate services, resulting in a younger generation accepting the challenge of managing the Library in a different way. While there was a desire to preserve as many time-tested traditions as possible in the new environment, in particular experience in dealing with parliamentary needs, 80% of the staff were well below 40 years of age, if not below 30. This predicated a high staff turnover through maternity and child-raising leave, which in Germany can be taken by both men and women. To be able to absorb these constant personnel losses library management needed to broaden as much as possible the operative base.

As a consequence, specialist knowledge could not be concentrated as it was in the past on a few persons in key positions of the various service levels, but rather needed to be distributed to as many people as possible in order to be able to keep pace with modern developments. Based on this situation, several working groups were formed at all levels, e.g. an internal working group on title entry and working groups dealing with special problems such as the entry and processing of audio-visual media, the conversion of old card catalogues, etc..

Various other working groups were formed by senior professional staff members of the library, including a discussion group in which the Chief Librarian directly briefs these groups about current problems in the library, and attempts to bring home demands being made by the parliamentary administration; and working groups on subject indexing and acquisitions.

In the course of time this loosening up of hierarchical structures led to people assuming a larger measure of personal responsibility in all areas of the library and to higher levels of

identification with the jobs they were doing. They knew what goals were being worked towards and they were fully included in the process of achieving those goals.

4. Communication with structures external to the library

Concurrent with its own internal reorganisation the library analysed the organisational structures of other subdirectorates. There seemed no valid reason, for instance, why the Press Documentation unit was in the Subdirectorate for Parliamentary Information, while the library, the Parliamentary Archives and the Subject and Speakers' Index units were in the Subdirectorate for Documentation. The organisation of data processing is concentrated in a central directorate for the entire administration. This continues to have negative effects for certain areas such as the Subject and Speakers' Index and for the library, since the software used there differs greatly from the usual office communications software. The members of the Information Technology Centre Subdirectorate often lack experience in these specialised areas of information processing. As such, it could make a lot of sense to equip these information departments with their own data processing specialists and to separate them from the Information Technology Centre Subdirectorate, or to integrate corresponding specialists from these departments in the Information Technology Centre Subdirectorate to act as channels of communication.

4.1 Difficulties in external communication

It has become apparent that colleagues in different areas of administration within the Bundestag employ different modes of thinking, seemingly based on the different nature of the work they undertake. Some parliamentary administrators tend to react with short-term considerations, whereas for a library the size of that of the Bundestag there is a need to carry out longer-term projects in addition to providing short-term solutions. Long-term strategies need to be developed alongside rapid reactions; staff must be inspired with goals for the future; work processes need to be given long-term structures; and emergent new technologies have to be prepared for and introduced. This difference in philosophy can produce areas of conflict, particularly when long-term strategies are to be developed. The potential for friction and dispute requires constant effort on the part of the Chief Librarian to promote understanding for this different perspective, and to assert appropriate professional librarianship interests.

4.2 Difficulties due to discrete management styles and interference caused by political circumstances

The limits of an open, communicative management style become apparent very quickly in the communication process with the hierarchies above the library. Whether change is resisted because of rigid mind-sets, or because of its political implications and subsequent unrest in the respective units, is hard to gauge.

An increasing cause of difficulty is that, to a large extent, the library today can only fulfil its function as a provider of information with the help of state-of-the-art technologies. This means that the head of the directorate and the head of the subdirectorate to which the library is assigned, should be addressing these technology requirements. In fact there seems to be a determined reluctance to do this, so it is essential to promote the cause of the library among relevant departments and members of parliament serving on the appropriate commissions of the Council of Elders. Unfortunately the members of the Budget Committee are often not dependent on information from the library, and hence are not able to appreciate at a user level, the worth of this valuable institution.

4.3 Disruption due to elections and their parliamentary effects

Attempts to engender a unified approach to management becomes all the more difficult when political change brings concomitant alteration to the higher positions of the administrative

hierarchy. In this case the head of the library has to recommence information campaigns with new appointees, with no certainty of a positive outcome.

The same applies with regard to cooperation with the commissions of the Council of Elders responsible for the affairs of the library. The Council of Elders Commission on Internal Affairs, is concerned with the opening hours of the library, personnel matters, or matter regarding equipment with software, while the Council of Elders Commission on Information and Communication has responsibility for matters concerning data processing. If, on the other hand, questions are involved that have to do with a new building, such as the one currently being built in Berlin, they have to be addressed to the Council of Elders Commission on Buildings. This fragmentation of authority and interests makes it difficult to gain acceptance for some of the library's objectives, and doesn't help to enhance cooperative action with department heads. Normally a department head has to deal with one commission. Since the Commission of the Council of Elders for Affairs of the Library, the Archive and Documentation fell victim to downsizing of the parliament administration after the 12th legislative term, the Chief Librarian is faced with having to deal with three commissions.

5. Outcomes from the new communicative management philosophy

The first phase of structural change in the library led to the planning of a number of major projects.

The principal project centred around automation of all library procedures. It was intended that the new system should provide a better evaluation of existing library resources for the user, faster information retrieval for members of parliament by reducing processing times, and a user interface facilitating information searches by users.

Other goals were:

Data contained in the old card catalogue was to be transferred to computer format, so that members of parliament would be able to search this resource electronically; a de-acidification process was to be carried out in order to preserve library resources of national value threatened by paper decay; the library's large collection of duplicates was to be dispersed; revival of the practice of publishing bibliographies on issues of current importance; members of parliament to have access to the library's hardcopy products as well as online products; reform of the thesaurus; plans for new buildings; plans for the move to Berlin.

Further crucial measures were imposed on the library in the context of personnel downsizing and budget cuts. They included: 50 % Reduction in the number of foreign periodical subscriptions; assessment of the Library's entire periodical intake to determine their value to the institution. This resulted in the cancellation of around 2,500 periodicals in the period 1991 to 1996, resulting in a net figure of less than 10,000 current titles. Most of these projects have been completed.

Completing projects such as these in the course of a few years is only possible if there is a consensus at all levels of administration on the importance of getting the job done. This presupposes that the objectives are known, that staff members have been informed, and that they have had a chance to internalise these goals to make them their own. This became very clear with the introduction of the new library software, an account of which follows, demonstrating that improved communication is a prerequisite for permanent learning with and from one another.

5.1 Introduction of new library software as an example of a "learning organisation"

On 1 January 1987 the Bundestag library introduced the use of computerised systems. This system was outdated in 1997. In 1998 an "off-the-shelf" system, called ADIS/BMS by a Berlin firm was implemented. Its enormous flexibility catered for nearly every specific aspect of a

given library's operations. To optimise this feature it was extremely important to ensure cooperation between librarians and the supplier. In this context the ability of the persons involved to understand each other is crucially important. This was where the various library working-groups played an invaluable role, both gaining and imparting knowledge through open communication.

5.2 Communication in the workplace creates flexibility

In addition to careful preparatory work, a key factor for the success of such a project is flexibility. It was an advantage that the system specifications were formulated by library staff operating in numerous small working groups. So many staff from virtually every level of the library were involved in this process, that there was always someone available who understood problems arising and who could provide expert advice. However management of the project lay in the hands of just a few staff members.

5.3 Communication leads to quality management

The specification brief was characterised by a mixture of general requirements laid down by the library management and individual requirements. The Data Processing Coordinator and his assistant outlined general ideas which were further developed by different working groups until they reached the implementation stage. These could be described as quality assurance groups. The same working groups were also involved in the process of software selection. Because the library had very detailed requirements for the final product, we were able to ask very specific questions during presentations by the various companies, and to subject individual software products to precise assessment and field testing over a period of several weeks. Although very time-consuming, this approach proved to be very successful in the end, with the library purchasing the product that came closest to satisfying its requirements. Even in moments of major frustration, staff motivation was always very high and personal initiative always present. Many members of the staff were totally committed to ensuring a smooth transition to the new software, which is a desirable prerequisite to the success of a project of this kind.

5.4 Communication and outsourcing

Since the Bundestag library does not have any data processing resources of its own, it was clear from the outset that any new library system and the accompanying computer resources would have to be purchased. It was also necessary to choose a company to supervise installation. From the experience gained through this exercise it is safe to say that the appropriate contractor should also be chosen on the basis of having personnel who are able to speak the same language as library staff (in other words, having a good knowledge of library practice and procedures), in order to ensure smooth cooperation.

Taking into consideration the fact that in the course of introducing the system, nearly all work-flows were monitored and adjustments made to the new conditions of work, it is indeed remarkable that this enormous task was completed in only one year. Without the prior introduction of new work methods; without the innovative open management structures that existed in the library; without an enormous training effort; and without the high level of staff motivation, it would not have been possible to complete this process.

The introduction of the new software in the library confirmed the virtues of cooperative communication. The library proved that it is capable of responding with extraordinary flexibility to the introduction of new technologies. It is very important that this message is recognised by the administrative hierarchies in the Bundestag, so that this new and powerful instrument 'library' can be brought to bear, and its effects felt outside the library itself. In times of continuing technological challenge including especially new information technologies, the library must subject itself to a process of constant change in numerous small steps. It is, as it were, a unit engaged in permanent learning in an ongoing process of development - a fact that

enables it to face up to, and deal with, new challenges. This learning process must always be kept in mind at the individual level, and must also be made an integral part of broader, overall strategies. These overall strategies must be as smoothly integrated in parliamentary structures as possible. It is only in this way that the potential of a library can be fully released and the benefits reaped.

6. Conclusion

In concluding let me summarise the theses I have put forward:

- Communication, involving all levels of the administrative hierarchy, is a basic prerequisite for libraries coping with constantly changing technological challenges. The Bundestag experience is that this can be best done internally by forming quality assurance groups and retaining these as permanent learning units, i.e. groups that learn constantly with one another and from one another.
- The importance of the communication process intensifies in circumstances where disturbances to work-flow are most likely to occur. These may include a clash of different work styles, a clash of interests, rivalries among specialists, or the negative inter-relationship between specialists and generalists. In all such situations there must be a degree of autonomy and a willingness not just to listen to the interests of the other side, but to learn, and to accept new ideas and practices. It is only by maintaining communication and flexibility that specialist libraries such as parliamentary libraries, can implement the process of renewal they have initiated.
- The benefits achieved through improved internal communication should be marketed to other administrators within the same hierarchy as the library, becoming a motivating factor for modernisation. It is vitally important that the environment for which the library's products are destined should undergo a parallel transformation. If the process of modernisation being undergone by a library collides with obsolete structures all around it, much of the effect of the modernisation of the library will be lost.
- The willingness to engage in meaningful communication presupposes use of **a common language,** and **a common understanding** of the tasks to be dealt with. Where a project necessitates outsourcing, there is a need to ensure that companies working with the library either already fulfil this requirement, or have the capability to learn what they will need to know, in order to fulfil this requirement. The task of the Chief Librarian in this context is to be aware of these factors ahead of time and to establish standards of conduct and general conditions in the workplace that will make it possible for library staff to assume an appropriate role in the requisite communication process.

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